Eszterházy Károly University Doctoral School of Education Science

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Theses of doctoral (Ph.D.) dissertation

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Pedagogy of Hungarian as Foreign Language, with special attention to teaching reading and writing

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THESES

Theoretical overview: the topic and the objectives of the research

Teaching Hungarian as Foreign Language (HFL) has a long history till nowadays. During the decades of its history a lot of experience, language books and methodological tools were issued. Apart from this there are important moments in its history as the establishment of institutions providing help for and/or teaching the language itself (Bándli, 2017; Nádor, 1998; Giay, 1991; Maróti, 2017). Meanwhile HFL has become an independent scientific field and already has its own scientific periodicals as THL2 (Nádor, 2005) and Hungarológia (Hungarian Studies). Besides this HF-teachers can experience lack of teaching materials, and the tools on methodological topic are also insufficient. The recent research may contribute to eliminate this lack.

The recent research intends to explore the questions about teaching HFL, with special attention to teaching reading and writing with the purpose of setting up methodological solutions for new ways of teaching and improving these two language skills that could also contribute to the advancement of other language skills. The proposed way of how to improve reading and writing skills in HFL is just one of the possible solutions.

The topic is due to several circumstances: the idea of a course book for children aged 6–10 years; experience for more than twenty years teaching HFL and the formulation of the importance of the phonological awareness in teaching reading and writing that can be used for more age groups not only children; and last but not least the presence of HFL as curriculum in the Hungarian school system. The topic was emphasized by the HFL-teachers' answers of the HFL-questionnaire after qualitative processing.

The research paper briefly describes the theoretical background of the topic then develops it to reveal the connections between the script of the mother tongue of the HFL-learners and the improvement of their reading and writing skills in Hungarian. The theses on the other hand aims to show the ties between reading/writing and their subskills in HFL to be taken into the language pedagogy for efficient use while teaching reading and writing.

The theses furthermore intend to outline a methodological framework which may contribute to the HFL teachers' language pedagogy and to the HFL-learners autonomous learning process. In case of approved hypotheses, the proposed methodological solution may be efficiently used for other alphabetical language teaching with special attention to reading and writing due to the theoretical background it is laid on.

As the research is about reading and writing in HFL, it belongs to the liberal Arts and it is interdisciplinary so the topic is investigated from various perspectives such as language pedagogy, psycholinguistics, neuroscience and dyslexia research etc.

The structure of the dissertation

The research paper consists of Introduction, Historical and theoretical overview of teaching reading and writing, Research Methods, Results, Discussion and Conclusion. The Hungarian and foreign scientific overview is followed by some details on the concepts of language acquisition and language learning, implicit and explicit knowledge, phonological loop, target language phonological awareness, neuronal recycling hypothesis, critical and sensitive period, the short history of dictation, the influence of mother tongue on foreign language learning etc.

The dissertation proposes a definition of *reading* and *writing* for methodological use based on the Speech perception model by Gósy (no year of issue).

In the spotlight of the research is the application of the phonological awareness taken from the field of dyslexia and its influence on reading and writing skills in HFL on one hand in case of HFL-learners with mother tongue with alphabetical and non-alphabetical (logographic) script and with different levels of foreign language knowledge according to the CEFR – on the other hand.

The phonological awareness is part of the language awareness (explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning); as it is treated as language specific (Jordanidisz, 2015), in case of Hungarian as target language it involves the detection and manipulation of sounds at two levels of sound structure: syllables and phonemes (Csépe, 2006). In the very beginning it was dealt with dyslexia in the field of mother tongue (L1) reading and writing (Bradly, Bryant, 1983; Snowling, 2000; Liberman, 1989; Goswami, 1990, 1991, 2003), more exactly in the case of children struggling with some or all of the many facets of reading and spelling. Whereas L1 phonological awareness has been extensively studied, research about L2 phonological awareness of learning a second language is extremely scare (Kivistö-de-Suza, 2015), specifically in connection with Hungarian as target language (Vincze, 2014a, 2014b). Though there are few statements about the necessity

of developing L2 phonological awareness (Lin, 2014) or the superfluity of it (Krashen, no year of issue).

In addition the influence of the phonological awareness of improving writing and spelling has its own importance due to the fact that a phoneme can be written as more than one grapheme, e.g.

Lengyel has also dealt with the phoneme-grapheme correspondence while trying to determine "the anatomy of the ontogenesis of Hungarian writing" (Lengyel, 1999: 180). The results of the recent research show that this is a point when matching the phonemes and graphemes there is a need for activation of L2 grammatical awareness too.

Upon HFL-teacher experience L2 phonological awareness can easily be eliminated from the short memory before reaching an automated level of functioning. Studies have been done about their connectivity (Németh, 2006), the statements are different; Csaba and Domján-Koncz (2017) say that the spelling results of children with weak short memory are poorer.

Gósy (no year of issue) emphasizes the importance of the visual and verbal short memory in reading and writing. Upon her statements we suggest the need for a combination of exercises to improve the phonological awareness and other types of exercises as a methodological variant (see later on).

The research

The research questions posed in the dissertation with the answers to them will be presented after the paragraphs on the hypotheses.

The **hypotheses** are formulated from the point of view of language pedagogy: the research results of any relative discipline are seen based on their usability in the language teaching process, their handy incorporation into the language teaching techniques and right on the target solutions.

Hypothesis 1: For the ones, who study Hungarian, it is far not enough to know the Hungarian alphabet, in order to be able to write down correctly the specific letters and letter

combinations, as well as to read out properly (i.e. comprehensibly enough in terms of meaning) the corresponding to them audio parallels.

This is in fact one of the essential issues of the dissertation: what kind of key components do the skills required for an appropriate reading and writing in Hungarian as a target language consist of, inasmuch as the knowledge of the Hungarian alphabet is not a sufficient tool for them to be acquired. It seems that the knowledge of the Hungarian alphabet on behalf of the foreign students is in vain, since many difficulties and problems arise in the practice of reading and writing. A number of HFL authors deal with the question of teaching the Hungarian alphabet in their studies (Csonka, 2005, H. Tóth, 2006, Schmidt, 2008, 2013), obviously for some particular reason.

Hypothesis 2: The more advanced phonological awareness of the Hungarian as a target language has a positive impact on the development of the reading skills in Hungarian.

It is a well-known fact in Hungarian mother tongue pedagogy, as well as in logopedics, that the quality of reading and spelling depends on the level of development of phonological awareness. One of the levels of phonological awareness, the phonological level, that is, the ability to manipulate with the syllables can be developed even prior to the first reading lessons, while the development of the other level, the one of the phonemes starts parallel to the reading teaching process (Csépe, 2006). For the reading comprehension though, the development of one's grammar/grammatical awareness and rich vocabulary etc. is further needed. To examine the extent to which one or another factor determines the level of reading skill, a new research is required concerning Hungarian as a foreign language.

Hypothesis 3: The more advanced phonological awareness of the Hungarian as a target language has a positive impact on the development of the writing skills and spelling in Hungarian.

It has been referred before to the interrelation between the developmental level of phonological awareness and the spelling literacy, which is well-known in L1 Hungarian as mother tongue pedagogy. Since the method and the toolset of teaching reading are largely determined by the characteristics of the target language (shallow orthography, transparency, agglutination type, etc. in case of HFL), the question arises as to the effectiveness of the reading and writing teaching method(s) used in Hungarian L1, when applied in teaching Hungarian L2, with special regard to the development of the writing skills.

Hypothesis 4: Foreign students learning Hungarian whose mother tongues have an alphabetic writing system are more likely to acquire the phonological awareness related to the Hungarian language, thus reaching a higher level of reading and writing skills and spelling than those whose mother tongue's writing system is not alphabetic.

From the pedagogical point of view of language teaching it is important to clarify this question, since in case the upper hypothesis is confirmed, different solutions should be applied in the process of teaching Hungarian to HFL foreign students taking into consideration the fact whether their mother tongue's writing system is alphabetic or non-alphabetic. In addition, it would be useful to answer the question whether there is any difference in the extent of the progress made, depending on whether or not phonological awareness of HFL foreign students is being developed at an early or later stage of language learning.

The research – although exploratory in nature – is applied linguistic in character and language pedagogical as well. The hypotheses were stated deductively, based on the review of the literature on psycholinguistic and neuroscientific research results. In the course of the work, the help of specialized literature in some related fields was used, for example, mother tongue pedagogy on teaching reading and writing, dyslexia and speech therapies related research. Based on the outlined interrelations, a framework for language pedagogical material was defined that could be of help to HFL teachers and HFL foreign students.

In the recent dissertation three research phases were separated within the combined paradigm, which were preceded by a so-called preparatory research phase: qualitative analysis of HFL-teacher questionnaires providing supplementary information to validate topic and to set hypotheses. Then come the three research phases as follows:

- qualitative and quantitative error analysis,
- longitudinal examination and
- a control group experiment.

Confirmation/Rejection of the hypotheses

From the annexes 6, 12 and 15 of the dissertation (details of the written works of some participants in the study sample and their audio recordings) it becomes clear that **the first hypothesis** must be considered as being justified. The theoretical references of the research, as well as the answers from HFL teachers also confirm that HFL foreign students familiar with the Hungarian alphabet often have difficulties with pronunciation, grammar, word order,

lack of reading and writing skills. That is, the knowledge of the Latin alphabet, but even the knowledge of the Hungarian alphabet in particular is not enough to develop literacy in the reading and writing skills in Hungarian.

The tasks intended and designed for Chinese native speakers were aimed at developing the phonological awareness of Hungarian as target language. The differences (Wilcoxon test: p=0,028) between the reading results before (error mean: 0,52) and after the experiment (error mean: 0,25), as well as the results obtained in the third research phase (independent sample test t''= -0,072, df=22, p= 0,050) also justified **the second hypothesis**: the more advanced phonological awareness of the target language has a positive impact on the development of the reading skills in Hungarian as a target language.

The third hypothesis can be considered only partially justified since the longitudinal experiment did not show any significant difference (Wilcoxon test: p=0,352) between the premeasurement (error mean: 0,5786) and post-measurements (error mean: 0,5214), meanwhile in the control group experiment, there was a significant discrepancy on L2 phonological awareness (Mann Whitney test: 20000, z=-2,606, p=0,009) between the results of the participants in the experiment who were trained in acquiring phonological awareness and those who were not; these discrepancies showed up in both cases: dictation (t^{*}= -8,168, df=20,453, p= 0,000) and freely self-written texts (Mann Whitney-test 32500, z=-1,966, p=0,049). Apart from the role of the development of phonological awareness, these two different results (in the longitudinal and the control group experiment) may also indicate that the effectiveness of phonological awareness development depends on the level of L2 knowledge. Therefore, further research is needed to fully justify the third hypothesis.

To confirm **the fourth hypothesis**, some of the results of the first research phase (quantitative error analysis) should be referred:

During the study of phonological awareness, a significant difference is to be noticed between the results obtained by the subsamples using logographic Chinese and alphabetic Cyrillic scripts in L1 (independent t-test: t'' = 2,907, df = 10, p = 0,016): Chinese native speakers participants showed up with a significantly higher error mean than the Cyrillic alphabet users. Based on the results, we may consider the fourth hypothesis as being justified.

Research results in the light of research questions

1. Is the knowledge of the Hungarian alphabet sufficient for the learning and development of the reading and writing skills in Hungarian as a target language? The question is definite: what is needed for it?

While verifying the hypotheses, with reference to the above, we have come to the conclusion and have stated that it is not enough.

The question behind the first hypothesis is that if the knowledge of the Hungarian alphabet is not enough then what is needed while learning HFL to be able to write down correctly the specific letters and letter combinations, as well as to read out properly the corresponding to them audio parallels? This is what has been examined in the research phases related to the development of phonological awareness. Based on the specialized literature and the results of the recent research the phoneme-based reading teaching backed up by relevant research in the Hungarian mother tongue pedagogy should be treated as a possible guiding technique applicable in the process of HFL teaching, since the same letters (of the Latin and the Hungarian alphabet) are related to different sounds (with some exceptions). It is important for us, HFL teachers to teach letter-and-sound compliance as one unit during HFL practicing sessions; this is supported by research on the sound-letter integration (Van Atteveldt, 2004, Csépe, 2006).

Theoretical work and my experiences as HFL teacher have led me to the recognition that the development of phonological awareness of Hungarian as target language is supposed to help, since the learning of how to read is practically based on it and it involves neural mechanisms related to the structure and characteristics of Hungarian language (shallow orthography, transparent writing system).

2. Can the relation of the Hungarian mother tongue phonological awareness and the Hungarian native speakers' reading ability be transposed to the relation between the phonological awareness of Hungarian as a target language and the reading skills of HLF learners? That is, does the more advanced phonological awareness lead to a more advanced reading skill in the case of a HFL learner, similar to the native Hungarian speaker?

This question is related to the second hypothesis. According to the second hypothesis, the more developed phonological awareness (PHA) of the Hungarian as target language has a positive impact on the development of reading skill in Hungarian. The above-cited test results

have proved the correctness of the hypothesis. This is evidenced by the correlation analysis of the relation between phonological awareness and reading skills. (p=0,012):

Correlations				
			Fonol tudat vizsgálat hibaszámai	Olvasásvizsg álat hibaszámai
Spearman's rho	Fonol tudat vizsgálat hibaszámai	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	,596
		Sig. (2-tailed)		,012
		N	17	17
	Olvasásvizsgálat hibaszámai	Correlation Coefficient	,596	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,012	
		Ν	17	18

Correlatione

 Table 1: Correlation between phonological awareness and reading in Hungarian as target language

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Hopefully the statements and arguments in the dissertation about the need to develop the phonological awareness which is also one of the indispensable prerequisites for becoming a good reader are convincing enough.

3. Can the relation of the Hungarian L1 phonological awareness and the Hungarian L1 spelling and writing skills be transposed to the relation between the Hungarian L2 phonological awareness and Hungarian L2 spelling and writing skills? That is, does the more advanced phonological awareness lead to a more advanced spelling and writing skills in the case of a HFL learner, similar to the native Hungarian speaker?

This hypothesis posed in the dissertation may be considered partially accepted, provided that a new research should be conducted by studying the *interlanguage* and the effect of phonological awareness development on spelling and writing skills in order to specify the results of the research.

4. Which is the field of the language learning process, where HFL students, who take part in the experimental study need additional help?

The HFL-students under observation, with special regard to the ones with a nonalphabetic mother tongue, native speakers of Chinese, as well as the ones that haven't taken part in phonological awareness development sessions, are required to exercise speech perception and recognition as a basis of a proper pronunciation in the target language, to develop phonological awareness, to exercise the syllable-by-syllable loud reading, writing dictation. It needs to be emphasized that while speaking about the fundamental significance of the audio input of the target language, we are not meant to ignore the audio output of the target language. It means that all learned language phenomena should be consistently practiced. What does that mean in the teaching process?

The importance of target language input underlined by Krashen also (which can have different forms e.g. immersion in the target language country; free voluntary reading etc.) is the essential prerequisite of the successful L2 learning. The amount of the L2 input can be increased by the usage of the L2 in the classroom (see the process-oriented writing and the genre approach to writing, or giving the lesson in L2) and by using different audio and video materials in and out of the classroom. (Among other things the attention has been drawn to the lack of such learning materials in the questionnaires by the HFL teachers.)

In his theory on the acquisition of L2, Krashen emphasizes the role of the input while Skehan (1998) and Swain (1995) as well as later Ellis (2005) also attach great importance to the aforementioned output. This has its own advantages, but is just mentioned here, without any claim for completeness, just as an example partly referring to Ellis:

- appropriate morpho-syntactic solutions should be applied by the language learner,
- one can test the correctness of the supposed functioning of the target language's grammar,
- the frequent output helps the automation processes,
- the student gets accustomed to hearing his own voice speaking a foreign language as early as the first lesson, accepts that as a natural element of language learning, so he can progressively get to the point that neither in the presence of the other students, nor in front of the teacher or in a real live situation it will be a problem or at least less of a problem for him to speak in a foreign language etc.

The modular framework of teaching reading and writing, presented in the dissertation, also builds on the permanent use of the target language on behalf of the learners. It is important to take the opportunities offered by blended learning (Vincze, 2014c). This is justified for several reasons: we can gain time for activities that the language learner is less able to do on his own at home. It is advantageous to give tasks that can be solved independently, for individual work at home, on one's own, because thus we also help the process of getting used to autonomous learning.

Considering the error counts in the research, it can be said that the tasks and subskills with the highest error mean (phonological awareness, loud reading, dictation, etc.) can be done at home, like work on one's own too.

5. Is the methodological material outlined on theoretical and experiential basis effectively applicable for teaching reading and writing?

The objective of the third phase of the research, the control group study, was intended to give an answer to this question. The methodological material was basically aimed at developing phonological awareness. It is undoubtedly effective in the process of developing the reading skills of Hungarian as a target language, besides it can be embedded in a variety of tasks in the cases of Chinese, Cyrillic and Arabic participants, as well as HFL students using the Latin alphabet. It is recommendable to keep the pattern of the task types while the words can change and, if necessary, to apply the use of visualization tools.

For beginners (A1 – breakthrough level) and A2 (waystage) level HFL students, it is advisable to regularly apply the tasks of the material aimed at developing the phonological awareness, all the way up to the automated level (which varies individually), from the B1 (threshold) level upwards – hopefully already with an adequate, comprehensible fluency in (loud) reading. Then we can use these tasks less often, or can insert them for some motivation or creating a better atmosphere in the "cumbersome" phase of the lesson.

While teaching beginner language learners, we have to take care of the regular and appropriate work with the tasks. We should practice and improve phonological awareness – possibly on a daily basis – as long as the proper letter recognition, the right combination of letters when writing, word recognition, word identification and flawlessly solved pseudo-word repetition tests can work without any doubt.

In the process of teaching writing, it may be used more often to beginner HFL learners than other levels, considering the minimum improvement rate between the first and second measurements in the longitudinal study phase and the results of the control group experiment.

6. Can any difference be observed and, if so, in what sense and to what extent in the reading and writing skills of HFL students with alphabetic and non-alphabetic mother tongue scripts?

The first research phase gives the answer to this priority question from language pedagogical point of view in. According to the research results, there was a significant difference both, in the reading and writing skills of HFL students with alphabetic and non-alphabetic mother tongue scripts (logographic script of the Chinese native speakers).

Conclusion, pedagogical implications for language teaching and suggestions for further research

The research examines the improvement of reading and writing skills in Hungarian as a target language within the frame of HFL related language teaching procedures in the context of HFL students with different L1-s. In the meantime the paper focuses on the effect of phonological awareness improvement on reading and writing skills, as well as on the compliance of the auxiliary materials used to develop the phonological awareness.

The research points out the significant difference between the two sub-samples from HFL-learning point of view, namely the sample of the Chinese native speakers with their logographic script of and the Bulgarian native speakers practicing the Cyrillic alphabetic script.

The research has also found that the development of the phonological awareness of Hungarian as target language improves the reading skills of HFL students. The results of the research are consistent in several aspects with the results of similar international research on reading skill of Chinese (logographic) L1 learners who study English (alphabetical) as L2. The positive impact of the Hungarian L2 phonological awareness improvement on the writing skills of HFL learners has been only partially proven. To study this question fully, further research is needed on the interrelation of Hungarian L2 phonological awareness development, writing skill and language proficiency on the one hand, and of the writing skill, grammar/grammatical awareness and vocabulary on the other hand (see above).

The dissertation highlights the practical use of theoretical knowledge in language teaching, which facilitates the HFL teachers in the preparation of their lessons. As such results can be regarded the pedagogical model of teaching reading, the modular framework for teaching reading and writing, the conceptual network behind the process of teaching reading and writing, that point the additional (sub)skills, elements of competencies and language phenomena needed to further development of these two skills.

With regard to the modular framework, it should be emphasized that from a different perspective it is nothing but language learning itself, as it includes language content, the cognitive components of reading / writing, the language skills, the necessary language input and output, the language lesson and the individual work at home. The detailed written material is the only missing thing. The study materials and in particular, specifying the rates of phonological awareness development depends on whether the group of language learners consists of beginners or students of different levels of proficiency (according to CEFR A1,

A2, ... C1). Since the modular framework thus developed outlines the framework for language learning, it may be helpful for HFL teachers to prepare a language lesson or even to plan a whole language course. For the interpretation and application of the modular framework, a comprehensive methodological approach as well as holistic vision is required.

The dissertation basically focuses on the need for the development of phonological awareness of Hungarian as target language and demonstrates that other ratio is desirable for teaching reading and writing in the case of HFL students with alphabetic and non-alphabetic mother tongue scripts, as for the latter is the case with the Chinese native speakers.

Phonological awareness (PHA) development and measurement tasks can be applied not only in teaching reading but also for motivational purposes, and together with other types of practices – such as syllable-by-syllable reading, dictations tailored to the level of language knowledge consisting of words only, sentences, shorter familiar, then unfamiliar longer texts – could help the individual HFL learning at home.

The tasks for developing and measuring the phonological awareness can be applied successfully for the improvement of the HFL students' reading skills regardless of their age. Besides, phonological awareness development and measurement tasks can be well combined with the development of pronunciation and listening comprehension and other related tasks (short-term verbal and visual memory), so it is likely to avoid students' frustration due to the difficulties experienced in pronunciation exercises.

In the dissertation, there are a number of crossing points between the examined linguistic phenomena which opens up opportunities for **further research**:

It would be appropriate to further examine the other skills and abilities associated with the writing skills involving the themes of vocabulary enrichment, spelling literacy, and so on. It is advisable to examine the connection between writing and phonological awareness development in a separate new research taking into consideration the perspective of interlanguage.

It is also necessary to carry out extensive research on the questions of motivation and HFL teaching. (This kind of research would be necessary for the following reasons: on the one hand, HFL was involved in the public education, so HFL teachers often encounter cases when HFL is no longer a voluntary subject chosen by students, they don't really have any special intentions with it. On the other hand – as pointed out by some questionnaire replies – the teaching method of a given language phenomenon may depend on the needs of the language learner. It is worth examining to what extent are HFL-teachers supposed to provide a person with an in-depth language knowledge, to teach him reading skills and comprehension, whilst

during his stay in Hungary he manages his communication mainly verbally. I would not leave that to the person learning the language, but maybe it would be worth thinking about this and issues of the like living in the age of secondary orality.

Learning a language can be equally important and useful, besides the connection between music and reading, their rhythm and melodiousness seems to be an interesting topic to be examined. On the one hand, because language, as well as music are conscious activities of the human race (Asztalos, 2012) and, on the other hand, because "sense of rhythm is an integral part of speech perception, writing, reading and even counting and spelling" (Gósy, no year of issue: 37).

There are many areas still waiting to be explored in the field of teaching reading and writing in Hungarian as a foreign language.

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